

Bush Energy Plan Fails New Yorkers

By

U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY)

While reading Assemblyman Bob Warner's article in praise of President Bush's energy plan, I found myself wondering if he and I had read the same plan. The Bush plan I read is certainly not "good news for New York", as Mr. Warner asserts. In fact, it is potentially very harmful to our state and the rest of the Northeast. Moreover, it provides no real solutions to the nation's immediate and long-term energy problems.

It is true that the administration's energy plan would be welcome news to some people: it would guarantee huge profits for the Big Oil and Big Electricity industries. But average Americans would be left in the dark. Residents of the Northeast would be particularly ill affected since the plan's reliance on increased production from coal-fired power plants and loosened environmental protections would mean more air pollution in our region. Enactment of the plan would devastate our environment by reversing the progress we've made in cleaning up our air and combating the effects of acid rain on our trees and lakes.

Assemblyman Warner writes of the need to correct the "fundamental imbalance of supply and demand." I wholeheartedly agree. But most of the opportunity to correct this imbalance lies in using energy more efficiently rather than increasing the supply. By promoting technologies that will help us reduce our dependence on fossil fuels we will also be protecting the environment and strengthening our national economy.

Over the last 25 years, America has saved or produced four times more energy through efficiency, conservation and renewable generation than has been produced from other new sources, saving consumers and businesses over \$180 billion. Increased funding and incentives for renewable energy technologies could make our power system more reliable and create millions of high-wage jobs, while saving energy, reducing pollution, cleaning up the environment, and ending our addiction to foreign oil. The Bush plan fails to lead in developing these technologies, and as a result the United States risks losing out on this enormous global market.

Given the deep budget cuts the president has proposed for conservation programs, any references to them in his vaunted energy plan are nothing more than rhetoric designed to create the illusion of conservation. The administration's budget will in fact do serious harm to the progress we're making in the development of energy-efficient technologies by slashing funding for important conservation programs that make buildings and appliances more energy efficient. Deep cuts are also made in funding for improving state and local building codes, and for R&D in buildings and transportation sectors. The budget cuts in half spending on alternative fuels such as wind, solar energy and fuel cells.

The centerpiece of the president's plan to increase the supply of oil is to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska. This would amount to nothing more than a gift to the oil companies with no significant benefit to the country. The amount of oil that could be recovered from this drilling would amount to less than a six-month supply for American consumers. None of the oil would be shipped east of the Rocky Mountains and no Alaska oil is refined into home heating oil.

On the other hand, increasing the fuel efficiency of new cars and light trucks by just 5% a year would cut U.S. oil use by 1.5 million barrels per day within a decade. Over 40 years, this would save ten to twenty times more oil than projected from ANWR, and more than three times the total U.S. proven oil reserves.

The president ignores fuel efficiency standards and disingenuously links support for renewable energy and conservation funding to drilling in ANWR. Since a majority of my colleagues in Congress recognize the ANWR drilling proposal as a needless despoiling of a national treasure with no long-term benefit, we will not allow it to go forward. The president knows this, so again, his support for these important measures is merely rhetorical.

As a member of the Interior Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, I am working to restore funding to conservation programs. The spending bill the subcommittee passed last week is a vast improvement over the president's budget request. But it still falls short of what needs to be done to solve our long-term needs. I am hopeful that other improvements will be made before the budget process concludes.